IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend claims 1-4, 8, 12, 16, and 19 as follows:

1.   (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A retrieval method for searching <u>for a second character element string including a designated second character element from</u> a first character element string <u>including a first character element</u> obtained by <u>respectively character-recognizing each character of a character string, comprising:</u> subjecting a character string to character recognition for a second character element string,

<u>selecting a third character element from a predetermined third character elements with which a distance relevant to a similarity with the second character element is predetermined;</u>

<u>wherein the third character element is selected when the distance with the character element of the designated second character element string is within a predetermined range with respect to a reference distance that is an acceptable value of the predetermined distance based on a reliability when character-recognizing the first character element and,</u>

<u>determining that the first character element matches the second character element when the selected third character element matches the first character element.</u>

wherein the first character element string includes a first character element and the second character element string includes a second character element, and

a distance relevant to a similarity between the first character element and the second character element is predetermined between the first character element and the second character element,

the retrieval method comprising the steps of:

comparing the distance with a first predetermined reference distance; and

determining whether the second character element matches the first character element based on a result of the comparison of the distance with the first predetermined reference distance.

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2.   (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein for the first character element, a reliability of character recognition is predetermined, and

a ~~the~~ first predetermined reference distance is determined based on the reliability.

3.   (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A retrieval method according to claim 2 [[1]], wherein the predetermined first reference distance is determined based on user input.

4.   (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A retrieval method according to claim 2 [[1]], further comprising the steps of:

changing the first predetermined reference distance to a second reference distance;

comparing the distance with the second reference distance; and

determining whether the second character element matches the first character element based on a result of the comparison of the distance with the second reference distance.

5.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein a plurality of distances relevant to the similarity between the first character element and the second character element are predetermined between the first character element and the second character element, and

one distance selected from the plurality of distances is used as the distance.

6.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 5, wherein the one of the plurality of distances is determined based on user input.

7.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein the distance has a probabilistic distribution.

8.   (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A retrieval method comprising: for searching a ~~first character element string obtained by subjecting a character string to character recognition for a second character element string,~~

~~wherein the first character element string includes a plurality of character elements,~~

for a specific character element of the plurality of character elements of a first character element string, a plurality of character elements having the possibility of being concatenated with the specific character element are predetermined,

the retrieval method comprising the steps of:

determining whether a character element string obtained by concatenating the specific character element of the plurality of character elements with one character element of the plurality of character elements, the one character element being different from the specific character element, matches at least a part of the second character element string.

9.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 8, comprising the steps of:

selecting one character element from the plurality of character elements having the possibility of being concatenated with the specific character element; and

determining whether a character element string obtained by concatenating the specific character element with the selected character element matches at least a part of the second character element string.

10.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 8, wherein the specific character element is located at an end of a row or column, the plurality of character elements having the possibility of being concatenated with the specific character element are each located at a head of a row or column.

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11.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 8, wherein the specific character element and one of the plurality of character elements having the possibility of being concatenated with the specific character element are located at the same row or column, and

the specific character element and another one of the plurality of character elements having the possibility of being concatenated with the specific character element are located at different rows or columns and at the same column or row.

12.   (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A retrieval method comprising the steps of: for searching a first character element string obtained by subjecting a character string to character recognition for a second character element string,

wherein the first character element string includes at least one first character element and the second character element string includes at least one second character element,

the retrieval method comprising the steps of:

obtaining a probability that a search result matches a the second character element string, based on the number of the second character elements, which is a searching keyword, included in the second character element string, and a number of the second character elements, which is a character recognition result including errors, matching the corresponding first character elements out of the second character elements included in the second character element string [[;]] and;

determining the correctness of the search result based on the probability.

13.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 12, wherein a distance relevant to a similarity between the first character element and the second character element is predetermined between the second character element and the corresponding first character element, and

the retrieval method further comprising the steps of:

comparing the distance with a predetermined reference distance; and

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determining whether the second character element matches the corresponding first character element based on a result of the comparison of the distance with the predetermined reference distance.

14.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 13, further comprising the step of:

for a second character element out of the at least one second character element included in the second character element string, said second character element not matching a corresponding first character element included 'in the first character element string, after resetting a predetermined reference distance, determining whether said second character element matches the corresponding first character element using the reset predetermined reference distance.

15.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval method according to claim 12, further comprising the step of:

dividing the second character element string into a plurality of character element portions.

16.   (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A retrieval device for searching for a second character element string including a designated second character element from a first character element string including a first character element obtained by respectively character-recognizing each character of a character string, comprising: subjecting a character string to character recognition for a second character element string,

means for selecting a third character element from a predetermined third character elements with which a distance relevant to a similarity with the second character element is predetermined;

wherein the third character element is selected when the distance with the character element of the designated second character element string is within a predetermined range with respect to a reference distance that is an acceptable value of the predetermined distance based on a reliability when character-recognizing the first character element and,

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<u>means for determining that the first character element matches the second character element when the selected third character element matches the first character element.</u>

~~wherein the first character element string includes a first character element and the second character element string includes a second character element, and~~

~~a distance relevant to a similarity between the first character element and the second character element is predetermined between the first character element and the second character element,~~

~~the retrieval device comprising:~~

~~means for comparing the distance with a predetermined reference distance; and~~

~~means for determining whether the second character element matches the first character element based on a result of the comparison of the distance with the predetermined reference distance.~~

17.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval device for searching a first character element string obtained by subjecting a character string to character recognition for a ,second character element string,

wherein the first character element string includes a plurality of character elements, and

for a specific character element of the plurality of character elements, a plurality of character elements having the possibility of being concatenated with the specific character element are predetermined,

the retrieval device comprising:

means for determining whether a character element string obtained by concatenating the specific character element of the plurality of character elements with one character element of the plurality of character elements, the one character element being different from the specific character element, matches at least a part of the second character element string.

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18.   (ORIGINAL) A retrieval device for searching a first character element string obtained by subjecting a character string to character recognition for a second character element string,

wherein the first character element string includes at least one first character element and the second character element string includes at least one second character element,

the retrieval device comprising:

means for obtaining a probability that a search result matches the second character element string, based on the number of the second character elements included in the second character element string, and a number of the second character elements matching the corresponding first character elements out of the second character elements included in the second character element string; and

means for determining the correctness of the search result based on the probability.

19.   (CURRENTLY AMENDED) A computer readable recording medium in which a program for causing a computer to execute a retrieval process for searching <u>for a second character element string including a designated second character element</u> from a first character element string <u>including a first character element</u> obtained by <u>respectively character-recognizing each character of a character string, comprising:</u> subjecting a character string to character recognition for a second character element string is recorded, and

<u>selecting a third character element from a predetermined third character elements with which a distance relevant to a similarity with the second character element is predetermined;</u>

<u>wherein the third character element is selected when the distance with the character element of the designated second character element string is within a predetermined range with respect to a reference distance that is an acceptable value of the predetermined distance based on a reliability when character-recognizing the first character element and,</u>

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determining that the first character element matches the second character element when the selected third character element matches the first character element,

~~wherein the first character element string includes a first character element and the second character element string includes a second character element,~~

~~a distance relevant to a similarity between the first character element and the second character element is predetermined between the first character element and the second character element,~~

~~the retrieval process comprising the steps of:~~

~~comparing the distance with a predetermined reference distance; and~~

~~determining whether the second character element matches the first character element based on a result of the comparison of the distance with the predetermined reference distance.~~

20.   (ORIGINAL) A computer readable recording medium in which a program for causing a computer to execute a retrieval process for searching a first character element string obtained by subjecting a character string to character recognition for a second character element string is recorded,

wherein the first character element string includes a plurality of character elements, and

for a specific character element of the plurality of character elements, a plurality of character elements having the possibility of being concatenated with the specific character element are predetermined,

the retrieval process comprising the steps of:

determining whether a character element string obtained by concatenating the specific character element of the plurality of character elements with one character element of the plurality of character elements, the one character element being different from the specific character element, matches at least a part of the second character element string.

21. (ORIGINAL) A computer readable recording medium in which a program for causing a computer to execute a retrieval process for searching a first character element string obtained by subjecting a character string to character recognition for a second character element string is recorded,

wherein the first character element string includes at least one first character element and the second character element string includes at least one second character element,

the retrieval process comprising the steps of:

obtaining a probability that a search result matches the second character element string, based on the number of the second character elements included in the second character element string, and a number of the second character elements matching the corresponding first character elements out of the second character elements included in the second character element string; and

determining the correctness of the search result based on the probability.

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